

# MEXICAN BASEBALL TEAMS IN THE MIDWEST, 1916-1965: THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL SURVIVAL AND CIVIL RIGHTS<sup>1</sup>

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## *Introduction*

Sports have been a major presence in the lives of Mexican Americans since the early 20th century. This has been particularly true of Mexican Americans in the Midwest, where sports such as baseball took on a special significance.<sup>2</sup> More than merely games for boys and girls, the teams and contests involved nearly the entire community, and often had political and cultural objectives. Like the *fiestas* celebrating Cinco de Mayo and September 16, sports are a thread that unites the community.

Sometimes, a thousand people, representing dozens of small Mexican communities, would gather to watch baseball games in the years prior to World War II. People socialized and discussed community issues at the games, and strengthened their sense of racial and ethnic solidarity. In the post-war period sports continued to play a major part in the overall cultural and political agenda of the Mexican American population.

In addition to community unity, two other key benefits of athletics have been the leadership skills and survival tactics that young people developed by participating in team sports—skills that have been useful in the political arena and in the fight for social justice. Many parents, in fact, encouraged their children to join teams to develop such skills. Thus, besides the sheer fun of playing and competing, sports have served as a means of establishing community solidarity, developing leaders, and imparting a sense of fair play. Marselino Fernandez of Kansas City noted that sports were:

a means to take out our aggressiveness in a positive way rather than a bad way in fighting or drinking in the streets. Sports definitely helped me become more outgoing, competitive, responsible, articulate, and to take charge. These types of critical skills for success in the real world were not taught to Mexican children in schools or other public places.<sup>3</sup>

### *Background*

In the early part of the 20th century, a handful of Midwestern Anglo charitable organizations and churches offered recreational activities for Mexican youth. In addition, a few of the YMCA clubs permitted Mexicans to join and use their facilities as members. Nevertheless, Mexican American communities chose to build their own sports networks according to several individuals who came of age in the 1920s, '30s and '40s.<sup>4</sup> They noted that the Mexican community established an elaborate web of athletic associations during the 1920s and 1930s. These included the Aztec Social Club, Los Gallos Athletic Association, *El Club Azteca*, and *El Club Deportivo Internacional*. The sports clubs of East Chicago and Gary, Indiana, *El Club Deportivo Internacional* and the Gary Athletic Club, sponsored a host of sporting events including tournaments in soccer, basketball, and baseball.<sup>5</sup>

In Kansas City, the Mexican Athletic Club was established in 1922 and organized numerous boxing events, bowling tournaments, and track-and-field competitions. In the larger urban Mexican communities, parents pooled their meager finances and purchased buildings and converted the structures into recreational centers. The smaller Mexican communities generally rented buildings for sports activities. These centers and the land around them were the locations of weight rooms, boxing rings, basketball courts, and baseball diamonds.

A handful of Mexican athletic clubs even had swimming pools according to Lando Velandez of Des Moines, Iowa.<sup>6</sup> Lando's father was active with sports activities and tried unsuccessfully to build a gym for the Mexican community in Des Moines. The Anglo power structure prevented the Mexican community from developing a sports center in the early 1920s. His father, nevertheless, did establish the Mexican Athletic Club in Des Moines in 1925. Lando continued his father's work, and in 1962, almost 40 years after his father's efforts, spearheaded the creation of the Mexican American Recreation Club.

World War II disrupted the sports movement in the Midwest as young men and women defended the nation both on the battlefield and in defense plants. Nevertheless, the post-war period witnessed a movement to recapture the athletic spirit and superb talent of the community. Both the second generation of Mexican Americans and recent arrivals from Texas and Mexico enjoyed sports immensely in the Midwest. In retrospect, the pre-war sports activities

among Mexicans was only a prelude to far more significant sports participation between 1945 and 1965.

There was an incredible growth in organized sports in the Midwest Mexican community after 1945. Before the war, major sports were limited primarily to baseball, boxing, and basketball. Afterwards, however, more Mexican Americans began taking part in bowling, tennis, golf, soccer, football, and wrestling. Women's sports came of age during this period as well. Whereas women were mainly involved with softball prior to the war, they later became active in baseball and basketball leagues, and bowling tournaments. Women's teams in all sports sprung up all over the Midwest.

The Mexican American community followed its rich sports tradition by resurrecting several sports clubs and recreational centers after World War II, including *El Club Deportivo Azteca*, the Mexican American Youth Association, *El Club de Deportivos de Joliet*, the Azteca Club, the Wichita Mexican American Athletic Club, the Pan American Club, the Mexican American Athletic Club of North Platte, the Argentine Center, *El Club Colonia Mexicana*, and *La Sociedad Deportivo*.<sup>7</sup> The Quad-Cities area of Iowa and Illinois formed several sports clubs, including the Quad-Cities Martial Arts Center, Pena's Boys Club, and the Silvis Youth Organization. In addition to developing their own clubs, Mexican Americans became active in various city sports and leagues, said Elmer Vega of Newton, Kansas:

Prior to the war, the Mexican community established its own sports network of clubs, centers, teams, and tournaments. The second and third generations have continued this rich tradition into the 1980s. There is, however, a significant difference. Unlike before, the second and third generations have become directly involved with Little League, Pop Warner, summer sports programs, high school sports, and other mainstream sports activities. We felt that, as taxpayers and citizens, our community and children were entitled to these recreational benefits.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, intergenerational cooperation was a powerful social adhesive that brought together people of all age groups playing sports. Alex Cruz of Parsons, Kansas, noted that:

I was the manager of the Parson's baseball team from 1952 to 1954. Our team was sponsored by several companies, including "Big Heated Red" and Coca-Cola. We played Chanute, Kansas City, Topeka, Coffyville, and Fredonia. . . . My father played baseball for the MKT railroad company

during the 1930s. It was not uncommon to have three generations of ballplayers from the same family in the Midwest.<sup>9</sup>

### *Baseball*

The most popular sport among Mexicans in the U.S. has been baseball. The rise of baseball as a spectator sport in the Mexican community simply reflected the rise of mass spectator sports in the nation. Nearly every Midwest Mexican community, small or large, had baseball teams to represent it. The sport became one of the major forms of recreation, and was played before overflowing crowds. Most of the teams selected names from their rich historical past, such as the *Aztecas*, *Mayans*, *Cuauhtemocs*, and *Aguilas*. The political choice of these names was a way of respecting and reaffirming the Mexican culture.

There were Mexican teams in the Topeka area as early as 1916, and by 1919 several Mexican baseball teams in the Kansas City and East Chicago areas were already playing. Additional clubs were organized and various leagues formed during the 1920s. Some of the early Mexican teams included *Los Obreros De San Jose* of East Chicago; the Osage Indians of Kansas City; the Mexican All-Stars of Silvis; the Moline *Estrellas*; the East Chicago Zacatecas Indians; *La Libertad* and *La Victoria* of Horton, Kansas; *Los Mayans* of Lorain, Ohio; *Las Aguilas Mexicanas* and *Los Cometas* of Topeka; *Los Lobos* of Hutchinson, Kansas; *Los Aztecas de Kansas City*; and *Los Nacionales* of Wichita, Kansas.

In fact, there were several popular types of baseball leagues in the Mexican Middle West: industrial, Catholic, community, migrant, and women's leagues. It was not unusual for a remarkable player to participate in two or more of these different leagues. Moreover, being an outstanding player was oftentimes a ticket to employment for Mexicans, because businesses wanted to have winning baseball teams. Companies went out of their way to find outstanding Mexican players. Furthermore, many Catholic schools had baseball teams composed largely of Mexican players and called themselves the *Guadalupanos*. Likewise, most Mexican communities had their own teams that represented them in statewide competitions.

Migrants had their own baseball teams during the summer months. These migrant teams and leagues were found in Western Nebraska, for example, in Scottsbluff, Bayard, Bridgeport, Morrell, Lyman, and Minatare. Other migrant teams could be found in Kansas, Minnesota, South and North Dakota,

and Colorado. There were women's teams that played prior to and after World War II as well. There was also an informal network of Mexicans who played pickup games between regular games and tournaments.

Unfortunately, for those trying to organize baseball games, it was often true that Mexican teams were not allowed to play on city diamonds or in parks owned by local businesses or cities. Elmer Vega of Newton, Kansas, considered one of the finest athletes to come out of the Newton area in both baseball and basketball, remembered:

Most public parks in the Midwest did not permit Mexicans to play organized sports. When we were allowed in the parks, we were given the worst diamonds and undesirable times to play. After World War II, the parks opened for us and we had few problems scheduling games and other recreational activities.<sup>10</sup>

Because they were barred from some public parks before the war, Mexicans made their own ball fields, frequently in vacant lots or in pastures near the railroad tracks, roundhouses, or steel factories. Players, coaches, and supporters constructed their own baseball diamonds. A location would be found, cleared of rocks and debris, and leveled. The women made the bases by sewing anew worn-out pillows. In North Platte, Nebraska, the games were played in a pasture during the 1930s. Dried cow chips were used as bases.<sup>11</sup>

The Mexican communities constructed baseball fields with colorful names such as *La Yardita*, *El Huache*, and Devil's Field. Another was known as Rabbit Field because players continuously had to chase rabbits off during games. Sometimes, cars were used in the outfield as bleachers, with people sitting on the hoods, trunks, and roofs, said Perfecto Torrez of Topeka.<sup>12</sup> Eva Hernandez of Hutchinson recalled, "Our baseball team . . . played near the National Armory. Both the Morton Salt and the Carey Salt Company had baseball teams with Mexican players. We played in the cow fields, which we affectionately called *Las Vegas*."<sup>13</sup> Hernandez's husband, Matt, was an outstanding baseball player and she often watched him play before and after World War II.

*El Parque Anahuac*, for example, had a seating capacity for 500 people. It was not unusual for large crowds to show up to see the better Mexican teams. When *Los Aztecas de Chicago* came to play against the East Chicago team during the first week of June of 1927, the game drew a standing room only crowd of over 3,000 spectators. Large crowds were common in the Great Lakes area.

This beautiful baseball diamond in East Chicago was eventually destroyed during the Depression because the wooden seats were used as firewood during the cold winter months. Also, someone discovered that beneath the surface of the field were deposits of coal. Apparently a coal or railroad company had left it there. The news spread quickly, and soon the leveled, desolate field became a center of activity with men, women, and children digging for the precious fuel with shovels and sticks.

Sunday was baseball day in Mexican communities across the Middle West. Residents first went to church and then breakfast before heading to the game. The players, on the other hand, ran home after church changing quickly into their uniforms and hurried back to warm-up before the fans arrived, said Phillip Martinez of Dodge City, Kansas.<sup>14</sup> The baseball games started around one in the afternoon. The people wore their Sunday best to the games.

Some of the games in Hutchinson drew better than a thousand people from in town and the surrounding communities said Bacho Rodriguez.<sup>15</sup> Rodriguez was an outstanding pitcher for the Hutchinson team during the 1930s. He remembers games that usually drew 1000 to 1500 spectators. He noted that he and a few other players were scouted by the New York Yankees.

Frequently, admission was charged. Different teams had various methods of raising funds. The money was sometimes used to purchase bats, balls, uniforms, and gas for road games. Most teams charged one dollar for men, fifty cents for women, and five cents for children at the gate. Other teams passed a hat around and collected contributions.<sup>16</sup>

Any money left over after the essentials were paid for was divided among the players. The winners usually received 60 percent of the gate; the losers took home 40 percent. The chance to collect a little money could increase players' energy levels. Ramon Padroza of Newton, Kansas, said that the zeal to win was fierce. He recalled that the Newton Mexican team played highly competitive games against teams from Wichita, Florence, Topeka, Emporia, Hutchinson, and Wellington:

The games were very intense. I was a pitcher and made it a habit to deliberately hit their first batter with a fastball in order to scare the rest of the lineup. Of course, the opposite pitcher did the same thing to our first batter, which sometimes led to brawls. After the game, however, we shook hands and drank beers together.<sup>17</sup>

Kansas City native Marcelino Fernandez said:

Community teams in the Midwest were quite sophisticated when it came to business operations. The Kansas City teams had business agents who negotiated and arranged games with other community teams. We also took a percentage of the gate receipts, and sometimes asked for gas money, meals, and a place to stay from some of the other teams. The good teams generally agreed to our conditions because they also made good money at the gate.<sup>18</sup>

Some Midwest Mexican teams participated in numerous whirlwind tours, playing far away from home according to Abe Morales of East Chicago, and Ernesto Plaza of Omaha.<sup>19</sup> On Saturday, the visiting team and its supporters gathered in the early morning, forming a huge caravan of cars moving along on country roads. It must have been an incredible sight to see dozens of cars packed with Mexican supporters following their teams down the road to the next game. As the line of cars of fans and their team approached, the cars honked their horns, signaling their arrival said Louis Sanchez of Dodge City.<sup>20</sup> These types of sports activities clearly demonstrated community pride in baseball teams and helped establish important political links between Mexican communities.<sup>21</sup> Frank Lujano of Newton, Kansas, recalled:

Sunday was always a big day for us back then. After working through the week, we always looked forward to the games, and the fans who followed us enjoyed them, too. This was a time for everyone to forget about work and problems and just have a good time. We had several hundred fans who came to the games each week, and when we made an error they let us know about it, but it was all in fun and we had a good time.<sup>22</sup>

Before the Sunday games, players from the two opposing teams would generally get together on Saturday night to party according to Salvador Gutierrez of Kansas City, Missouri, and Lupe Molina of Kansas City, Kansas.<sup>23</sup> They noted that some teams would attempt to induce the best players on the opposing team to get drunk, so they would be ineffective the next day. Sometimes this ploy backfired because a few players actually seemed to play better with hangovers. Some teams imposed a 10 p.m. curfew before important games to prevent such shenanigans. Mexican men were often utilized as umpires in the Mexican leagues. Ann Antilano of Sterling, Illinois, recalled her father talking about his Midwest umpiring experiences in Gary, Indiana.<sup>24</sup>

Mexican teams from Texas and Mexico barnstormed the region and played exhibition games against local Mexican teams prior to the 1940s. Providing

competition for Mexican Midwest teams were *Los Cometas* from Morelos; *Carta Blanca* from Monterrey; *Los Aztecas*, *Los Cuauhtemocs*, and *La Junta* from Mexico City; and *La Fuerza* from Guanajuato.<sup>25</sup> The best teams from Texas were the Navarro Club and the *Aztecas* from San Antonio.

Nearly all of the Mexican ballplayers were big fans of major league teams and players. Many Mexican players took the bus or hitchhiked to major league ballparks to see their favorite teams and idols at Wrigley Field and Comiskey Park in Chicago, Baker's Field in Philadelphia, and Sportsmen's Park in St. Louis. Art Morales of East Chicago said that he and other young men found creative ways to get to the big league games:

I used to hitchhike to old Comiskey Park in Chicago. I tried to make the games when the New York Yankees were in town. My favorite player was Joe Dimaggio, the greatest player to wear a baseball uniform in my opinion. Many of my fondest memories as a boy [are of] the ballpark.<sup>26</sup>

Ramon Padroza of Newton, Kansas fondly remembered:

We all had our favorite ballplayers during that time. My favorite ballplayers were Lefty Gomez and Babe Ruth. I remember watching a game at Wrigley Field between the Cubs and Pirates. It was one of the biggest thrills in my life. Some of us on the industrial teams were scouted by some of the major league teams and received official invitations to attend spring training. But our families needed us as breadwinners at home.<sup>27</sup>

Leo Barajas of Omaha, who was an outstanding ballplayer, remembers attending a World Series game:

I attended the 1942 World Series between the St. Louis Cardinals and the New York Yankees. We waited nearly two days in line for tickets. The Cardinals' "Gashouse Gang" was the most popular team among us because it was one of the few teams in the Midwest. Attending the World Series is one of the highlights of my life.<sup>28</sup>

Ralph Rios of Sterling, Illinois, echoed these sentiments. Rios was born in Kansas City in 1927, and as a boy watched the Mexican baseball teams from Kansas and Missouri. Said Rios:

Many of us loved listening to major league baseball during the 1930s and 1940s. My favorite team and player were the St. Louis Cardinals and Stan Musial. I read the boxscores every morning to see how the Cardinals and Musial had done the day before.<sup>29</sup>



Victoria Quintana of Parsons, Kansas, recollected that her brothers attended many games in Philadelphia and New York, and were especially fond of Connie Mack's "As":

Many of us in Kansas had friends and relatives living in Pennsylvania. During the summers, we would visit them and go shopping in New York. Our brothers, however, preferred going to the ballparks to watch the Dodgers, Giants, Yankees, and the Athletics. My brothers were always excited to go to the East Coast because of all the baseball teams, whereas there were no major league teams in Kansas.<sup>30</sup>

Matt Hernandez noted that several communities formed all-star teams showcasing the best Mexican players.<sup>31</sup> He said that the all-star games were often reported in the sports sections of the local newspapers with complete boxscores. Hernandez played for the Hutchinson Mexican team from 1934 to 1936. His team played Mexican teams from Lyons, Dodge City, Newton, and Wichita.

A consequence of these all-star teams was that many players became local sports legends and some even had the thrill of being scouted by teams like the Chicago Cubs, St. Louis Cardinals, New York Yankees, and Cleveland Indians, according to Abraham Vela of Omaha.<sup>32</sup> Sebastian Alvarez of Fort Madison, Iowa, talked about his own experience with the big league scouts:

We had an outstanding baseball team in Fort Madison. We played very good Mexican teams from the Quad-Cities area and several teams from Kansas and Missouri. In the stands were scouts from the various major league teams. I received two letters from the Chicago Cubs asking me to come to a tryout camp. My parents were opposed to it because I needed to work to help the family.<sup>33</sup>

Art Morales of East Chicago had a similar experience:

The Chicago Cub scouts saw me play and gave me a ticket to Chicago to try out for the team. But my parents wouldn't let me go because they believed that Chicago was a wild town and it would corrupt my morals.<sup>34</sup>

### *Women's Teams*

In the years leading up to World War II, there were several Mexican women's teams in the Midwest. These teams were managed and coached by all-male staffs, and games were often played in small, nearby fields while the male teams were playing on the major diamond. The women's teams often traveled with the men's teams. In addition to concurrent games, there were sometimes double-

headers, with the women playing in the morning and the men playing afterwards.<sup>35</sup> Carol Garcia Martinez, an outstanding pitcher, was born in Mexico in 1923, and later played first base for *Las Gallinas* of East Chicago. She remembers the green satin uniforms they purchased after taking a collection:

Some young women were active in all types of sports in school. We formed community teams because we enjoyed sports. Most of our parents were supportive as long as our older brothers and male friends were watching over us. We played nine innings and basically played by the same rules as the men. Our games were extremely competitive.<sup>36</sup>

Before the war, the best-known women's teams were *Las Gallinas* of East Chicago; *Las Cuauhtemocs* of Newton, Kansas; *Las Aztecas* of Kansas City; and *Las Amapolas* of South Chicago. There were also Mexican women's teams in Chicago; Emporia, Kansas; and in Gary and Whitney, Indiana.<sup>37</sup> The state of Nebraska had women's teams in Bayard, Grand Island, Omaha, and Lincoln.<sup>38</sup> *Mexican American Harbor Lights*, an East Chicago publication, noted that the women's baseball teams

. . . performed with devotion, speed, and great skill. The audience loved every great play they made, especially a stolen base. The parents made sure the girls were on time for all games and practice. Hundreds of fans came to see them play.<sup>39</sup>

According to several eyewitnesses, the women's teams were excellent, and exciting to watch. A few of the women might have been better players than some of their male counterparts according to Frederick R. Maravilla of East Chicago:

The Kansas City and East Chicago teams had several excellent players. Some of the women were gifted athletes, while others learned to play outstanding ball from their brothers. The coaches used to say that we wanted some of the women on our men's team, which nearly always brought laughter from the guys because they thought we were joking. We weren't kidding.<sup>40</sup>

A handful of women became folk heroines because of their exploits on the diamond. As was the case with the men's teams, some of the women's teams had junior or "B" teams. *Las Gallinas* from East Chicago, for example, had a junior team called *Las Gallinas Chicks*. Some Mexican girls also played baseball with the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) and in various city leagues and tournaments prior to World War II.<sup>41</sup>

### *Post-War Baseball*

Baseball had an amazing revitalization throughout the Midwest after 1945, and its popularity was directly linked to the political and civil rights activities of the Mexican American community. Alberto Muniz said:

Sports have been and continue to be an important part of our history. Prior to the war, the fiestas, politics, and sports were integrated and not viewed as separated activities. Our parents' generation clearly understood the social importance of combining culture, civil rights, and recreation as one enterprise. The second generation continued that strong tradition after the war.<sup>42</sup>

Al Lopez, manager of the Chicago White Sox during the late 1950s and early 1960s, for example, was a member of the Chicago chapter of the American G.I. Forum. In 1962, Lopez received his membership card in pre-game ceremonies at Comisky Park from G.I. Forum local officials. Also, the G.I. Forum National Convention sponsored a game at Wrigley Field in Chicago in 1963.<sup>43</sup>

There were other significant changes in sports that reflected the gains of the civil rights movement. The hiring of Mexican American umpires and league officials was a major breakthrough. For the first time, the post-war period witnessed the mass participation of Mexican American youth in Little Leagues, Pony and Colt teams, and high school teams. Youth were visible in all aspects of school and community sports whereas few Mexican American children played school sports or city-sanctioned teams prior to the 1940s. Ramon Pedroza of Newton, Kansas, said:

After the war, Mexican American teams played in city tournaments and leagues with white teams, which was different [from] when white teams refused to play Mexican teams in the 1920s and 1930s. We felt this was a step in the right direction. At the same time, we maintained our own community tournaments and leagues. The softball team of Newton, for example, took the city championship in the late 1940s.<sup>44</sup>

Another significant change was the skyrocketing popularity of softball after the war. Although there were some slow- and fast-pitch softball teams before the war, they were relatively few in number. The first softball games in the Mexican community in the Midwest were played in the 1930s. In 1937, there were a few softball teams such as *Los Diablos* of East Chicago. *The Kansas City Star* reported on a Mexican softball tournament which took place in Central

Kansas in 1938. The Mexican teams represented at this tournament included Wichita, Hutchinson, Salina, Newton, Kanapolis, and Lyons. The newspaper article further noted that there were big crowds and that the *Bravos* had won the championship.

Another key reason for the growing popularity of fast- and slow-pitch softball was that most veterans were raising families and getting older. The slower pace reflected their physical condition.<sup>45</sup> They had to be careful not to get hurt and miss work because they had to pay the bills. Yet, these former players still played hard because they were competitive.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, a few Mexican American hardball teams and leagues survived after the war, including the Topeka *Aztecas* and *Aguilas*.

Between the late 1940s and the early 1960s several Mexican American, Latin American, and Spanish American baseball leagues, as well as state and regional softball tournaments, were established. Many of these tournaments are still going.<sup>47</sup> Tournament games could be found each weekend in places like Newton, Kansas City, Flint, Des Moines, Pontiac, Port Huron, Omaha, Chicago, Emily City, Detroit, Emporia, Capac, Cudahay, Milwaukee, and Bethlehem. A case in point was the Chanute Softball Tournament that was held from 1963 to 1979. Other Mexican communities in Kansas have sponsored their own tournaments, and Kansas City alone had five baseball teams.<sup>48</sup> Something special that has emerged in some of these tournaments is the "old-timers" game, which precedes the championship game. Some of the players from the 1940s, 50s, 60s, and 70s compete for fun and friendship. These games have been sponsored, for example, in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, and in Newton, Kansas. This recognition is a tribute to these pioneers who faced discrimination and, in turn, fought prejudice so that future generations could play sports in public facilities and join mainstream leagues such as the Little League and Pop Warner football.

In fact, one of the oldest softball tournaments takes place each year in Newton. This tournament can be traced back to 1948, when the Latin American Club (formed in 1946) sponsored the first tournament. Dozens of teams throughout the Midwest, Texas, and other southwestern states have participated in the Newton competition during the last 50 years.<sup>49</sup> One of the dominant teams after the war came from Oklahoma. Other championship teams include the Newton Mexican Catholics (1946), Newton McGee (1948), Wichita

*Guadalupanos* (1950), Topeka *La Siesta* (1963), and Kansas *Los Bravos* (1969 and 1970).<sup>50</sup>

The Newton Softball Tournament still plays the cultural role that pre-war baseball games promoted among Mexican Americans. The tournament events center around family, friendship, and community unity. The games are only one part of the weekend's events. There are picnics, dances, games for the children, and an opportunity for renewing old friendships. In Omaha they have played the Mexican Softball Tournament for many years at Hitchcock and Upland Parks. Teams have come from Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa, Colorado, and Kansas. Here too, the tournaments have sponsored old-timers games with many former players, some who played during the 1940s and 1950s, competing against their grandchildren and other old-timers from surrounding communities.

Michigan had teams such as the Pontiac Mayans and Aztecs, the Adrian Pirates, and a team in Ecorse called the Latin American Club. Lalo Perez of Flint said proudly that:

The state of Michigan was a hotbed for Mexican baseball during the 1940s through the 1970s. We had a baseball team here in Ecorse sponsored by the Latin American Club. There were teams in Flint, Detroit, Lansing, Adrian, Emily City, Port Huron, and Pontiac. We also played Mexican teams from the state of Ohio.<sup>51</sup>

Over the years, Michigan has produced some outstanding baseball players. The Villareal brothers from Lansing were two of the best in the state. Flint has had its share, too, including one that pitched for Michigan State University. The Castanon brothers, Joe, Frank, Hank, and Marty, from the city of Alma were known for playing great baseball in the '60s and '70s. Steve Benavidez of Detroit played baseball at Eastern Michigan University in the 1980s. Saginaw had the Vasquez brothers, Joe and Tiburcio "Tovito," in the 60s and 70s. Mexican American baseball in Saginaw goes back to the 1940s and 1950s when the *Gallitos* were playing.<sup>52</sup>

In 1958, the Spanish American League was formed in Flint.<sup>53</sup> Other baseball tournaments have also been referred to as "Latin American" or "Hispanic." The main reason for this ethnic designation was because players comprised diverse backgrounds, including Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and other Central and Latin Americans.<sup>54</sup> Aurora, Illinois, for instance, established the Latin

American Baseball League.

Ohio and Pennsylvania likewise saw a dramatic increase of Mexican softball teams after the war. A Mexican American team was formed in Toledo as early as 1947. Eventually, teams were established in Bowling Green and Cleveland. Most of those in Ohio were industrial teams as opposed to community or league teams, and frequently traveled to Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois playing in Mexican American softball tournaments.<sup>55</sup>

As was the case before the war, major league baseball scouts continued to visit the Midwest looking for future big league players. Both the Cleveland Indians and the Chicago White Sox sent team representatives to scout Mike Torrez, who was playing for the Topeka Nationals. Torrez later signed a major league contract and later played for the Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees during the 1970s. His brother, Richard Torrez, played with the Topeka basketball team in the Midwest Mexican American Basketball Association.<sup>56</sup> Another great player was Julio Rodriguez from Saginaw, who played for Central Michigan University and later was drafted by the Kansas City Royals. Julio spent a few years in the minor leagues and eventually returned to Saginaw. He was a power hitter outfielder, one of the fastest players around, and had a major league arm. People in the stands were in awe of his tremendous throwing ability and accuracy from the outfield.<sup>57</sup> One of the best fast-pitch softball players in recent memory was Martin "Marty" Castanon from both Alma and Lansing, Michigan. He played in a traveling league that included some of the worlds best pitchers and teams in fast-pitch softball.

Paul Sanchez of Wichita was an outstanding pitcher between 1964 and 1990, with a break for military service in Vietnam. In 1976, the "Big Brown Machine" had several prominent players who were scouted by both the St. Louis Cardinals and the San Francisco Giants, most notably the two Ontiveros brothers, Jose and George.<sup>58</sup>

The Catholic Leagues continued to be popular after the war. There were Catholic Youth Organization leagues and St. Jude's teams. Mexican Americans often played for both Catholic schools and Little League teams. Catholic softball tournaments flourished in several cities in Kansas. There were also city and independent leagues where Mexicans played baseball, but regardless of the level play, Mexican American teams and players were generally talented and competitive.

Mexican women's softball teams began to flourish in the late 1940s and

early 1950s. There was a women's softball team in East Chicago by 1949. *Las Aztecas* of Kansas City won the city championship about the same time. Newton, Kansas, also had established teams in the 1940s, and there were also outstanding women's teams in Sterling, Illinois, and Lincoln, Nebraska, according to Dolores Rios and Marge Villanueva Lambert.<sup>59</sup> Rios played in the summer baseball leagues in Illinois in 1947 and 1948, and noted that baseball was very popular among Mexican women after the war. Lambert also remembered that Nebraska had several women's teams:

Mexican women played baseball before World War II. Many of them worked during the war but resumed playing after the war ended, along with younger women. The state of Nebraska appears to have had several women's teams starting as early as 1946. There was also a team of women in the city of Lincoln.<sup>60</sup>

Fifi Jasso of Newton, Kansas, who was born in Newton in 1932, recalled:

I played third base for the Mexican American women's team of Newton in 1949 and 1950 . . . We had lots of fun and I have many wonderful memories of those days. Sadly, some of my former teammates have passed away.<sup>61</sup>

The employment of women after the war resulted in their playing for industrial teams and leagues as well. Said Juanita Vasquez:

Most of the industrial teams prior to the war were for men. However, the growing number of women in the workplace after the war resulted in the formation of women's sports in baseball, basketball, and bowling. At the time, we did not realize that our entering factories represented the benefits of industrial sports.<sup>62</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s the growth of baseball throughout the Midwest continued. Some Mexican communities have both fast-pitch and slow-pitch teams. Saginaw for example, was the host of the Annual Latino State Fast Pitch Tournament during the 1980s. There was also a Mexican American Slow Pitch Softball league in Saginaw that used to take over Hoyt Park and Wickes Park with 16 teams playing every Sunday. Pontiac and Detroit had some great teams during this period, when Pontiac hosted the Annual State Latino Tournament.<sup>63</sup>

Oklahoma City has recently established a ten-team *Liga de Beisbol Mexicana*, while Chicago has formed the *Aztec* and *Mayan* Leagues. Southeast Kansas, the Quad-Cities, and the Fox Valley of Illinois is experiencing a rise in the number

of new baseball teams, leagues, and tournaments. Saginaw, Lansing, and Pontiac had excellent women's softball teams in the '70s and '80s. The Saginaw team, coached by Chan Flores and sponsored by *Casa del Rey*, was dominant and won the Michigan Hispanic Women's State Tournament for years.<sup>64</sup>

### Summary

Midwestern Mexican American communities, for the better part of 70 years, have produced many talented athletes, as well as numerous teams, leagues, and tournaments. This occurred because of the numerous individuals who put so much effort into developing youth sports programs and other organized sports activities.

These sports—especially baseball, but also boxing, basketball, and other contests—played multiple roles in the life of the community. Involvement in sports taught young people the rules of fair play, helped develop their physical and organizational skills, and helped them channel their competitiveness in a positive way. These activities brought Midwestern Mexican people together across miles and circumstances, and brought joy to competitors and spectators alike.

With sports, Midwestern Mexicans had heroes to congratulate, teams to rally around, positive activities for their children, and shared experiences with which they could build a stronger sense of cultural unity and common purpose. To these people, sports were not just games; they were important elements of community identity and political empowerment.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This article is an excerpt from an unpublished manuscript entitled, "*Cuentos y Encuentros: An Oral History of Mexicans in the Midwestern United States, 1900-1979.*" The majority of interviews were conducted during my sabbatical leave between 1987 and 1988. Many of the people interviewed resided in Kansas, a state that had the dubious reputation of being the most racist state with respect to Mexicans. This helps to explain, in large part, the long history of Mexican organizational resistance there. Many of the individuals cited are now deceased. This article is dedicated to them.

<sup>2</sup> There is a growing number of books, articles, and videos on the history of Latino baseball in the U.S. A sample of these works includes James D. Cockcroft, *Latinos en el béisbol de los Estados Unidos*, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, México, D.F., 1999; Michael M. Oleksak, *Béisbol, Latin Americans, and the Grand Old Game*, High Top Sports Production, Inc., Hollywood, CA, 1992; USA Home Entertainment, *MLB Latin Superstars*, MLB Home



- Video, New York, 2000; Schlessinger Video Productions, *The Hispanic and Latin American Heritage Video Collection*, Bala Cynwyd, PA, 1995; Carlos García, *Baseball Forever*, México, 1979; Jonah Winter, *Beisbol! Latino Baseball Pioneers and Legends*, Lee and Low Books, New York, 2001; and Gilbert García's "Beisboleros: Latin Americans and Baseball in the Northwest Region," Unpublished paper, Eastern Washington University, no date.
- <sup>3</sup> Interview with Marselino Fernandez, Kansas City, Missouri, February 26, 1987. Fernandez was an outstanding athlete in the Kansas City area and excelled in several sports. He is also a prominent sports historian regarding the Mexican American communities in Kansas and Missouri. Fernandez was inducted into the Kansas City Mexican American Sports Hall of Fame in the early 1980s.
- <sup>4</sup> Interviews with Blas Esquivel, Kansas City, Missouri, March 1, 1987; Josephina Jaramillo Martinez, Los Angeles, California, April 17, 1995; and Joseph D. Gonzalez, October 16, 1987, author's files. Esquivel was born in Mexico in 1910 and came to the U.S. in 1926 and has an excellent knowledge of sports in the Kansas City area. Martinez was born in Mexico in 1901 and remembers Justine Cordero and Louis Garcia, who were active with youth sports in South Chicago during the 1920s. Gonzalez played baseball for *Los Gallos* baseball team in East Chicago between 1938-1941.
- <sup>5</sup> Ciro H. Sepulveda, "Social Life and Nativism in La Colonia del Harbor." In *Forging a Community: The Latino Experience in Northwest Indiana, 1919-1975*, Edited by James B. Lane and Edward J. Escobar, Cattails Press, Chicago, 1987, p. 87.
- <sup>6</sup> Interview with Lando Velandez, Des Moines, Iowa, June 17, 1986.
- <sup>7</sup> Written correspondence with Ricardo Medina, Blyth, California, March 2, 1995, and Ricardo Parra, Indianapolis, Indiana, author's files.
- <sup>8</sup> Interview with Elmer Vega, Newton, Kansas, June 10, 1987.
- <sup>9</sup> Interview with Alex Cruz, Parsons, Kansas, June 9, 1987.
- <sup>10</sup> Interview with Elmer Vega, Newton, Kansas, June 18, 1987.
- <sup>11</sup> Written correspondence with Porfy Nila, North Platte, Nebraska, January 11, 1999.
- <sup>12</sup> Interview with Perfecto Torrez, Topeka, Kansas, February 10, 1987. Torrez was an outstanding player in the Topeka area, especially between the years 1931-1937. He pitched for the *Piratas*, *Nacionales*, *Cometas*, and the Bakers. Torrez pitched a perfect game against the Mexican team from Emporia during the 1930-31 season.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview with Eva Hernandez, Hutchinson, Kansas, March 21, 1988. Some Mexican Midwest baseball teams were allowed to play in public parks, including Block Park, Washington Park, Blackhawk Park, Beaver Park, Credit Inland Park, Burke's Park, Southeast Recreation Center, Sunday Park, Athletic Park, Union Pacific Park, Sinnissippi Park, John Deere Diamond, Douglas Park, Barstow City Park, and Levings Park.
- <sup>14</sup> Interview with Phillip Martinez, Dodge City, Kansas, June 24, 1988. Martinez played baseball for the Dodge City *Aztecas* during the 1930s. He played third-base and noted that this decade witnessed some of the best Mexican ballplayers and teams throughout Kansas. These Kansas teams included Chanute (*Los Toreros* and the Eagles), Independence, Coffeyville, Pittsburgh, Garden City (Latin Americans), Dodge City (Mexican Eagles and the *Aztecas*), Deerfield, Florence, Emporia (*Los Morelos*), Parsons, Atchison, Peabody, Iola, Fredonia, Argentine (Eagles), Hutchinson (*Lobos*), Newton (*Cuauhtemoc*), Wichita (Aztecas), Horton, Lyons, Wellington (Mayans), Syracuse (Merchants), Topeka (*Aguilas* and Nationals) Nixon, and Herington.
- <sup>15</sup> Interview with Bacho Rodriguez, Hutchinson, Kansas, January 28, 1987. Also interview with Francisco Vargas, Topeka, Kansas, February 10, 1987.

- <sup>16</sup> Interview with Frank Lujano, Newton, Kansas, June 18, 1987. Lujano was born in 1913 and later played baseball for the Newton *Cuauhtemocs*. He noted that the 1920s and 1930s saw outstanding teams in Topeka, Wichita, and Wellington, Kansas. His wife still has his cotton uniform from the 1930s. Almost everyone agrees in Newton that Lujano was one of the best ballplayers of all time.
- <sup>17</sup> Interview with Ramon Pedroza, Newton, Kansas, June 18, 1987. Like so many young men of his generation, Pedroza served during World War II and saw action in Africa and Italy. Pedroza was born in Newton in 1913. He was an outstanding baseball player in the community of Newton and played pitcher and first base in 1931 for the *Cuauhtemocs*. Also, interview with Jose G. Calvillo, Hutchinson, Kansas, author's files.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with Marselino Fernandez, Kansas City, Missouri, February 26, 1987.
- <sup>19</sup> Interviews with Abe Morales, East Chicago, Indiana, May 19, 1987, and with Ernesto Plaza, Omaha, Nebraska, May 30, 1987. Morales was active with sports in the Gary, Indiana area. He noted that Gary had an outstanding baseball and basketball teams prior to World War II. Morales added that most of the sports activities were sponsored either by companies or the Catholic Church. Plaza played baseball in the western part of Nebraska prior to the 1940s. He added that there were several outstanding Mexican teams in this region including teams in Scottsbluff, Mitchell, Morrill, Lyman, Alliance, and Bayard.
- <sup>20</sup> Interview with Louis Sanchez, Dodge City, Kansas, January 21, 1987. As a young boy during the 1920s, Sanchez was the batboy for the Mexican teams. Later, Sanchez played for the Santa Fe Railroad baseball team during the 1930s and 1940s. They played several local Mexican teams including the *Aztecas* from Dodge City and the Garden City Latin Americans.
- <sup>21</sup> Interview with Marselino Fernandez, Kansas City, February 26, 1987. Fernandez was born in Arizona in 1913. He noted that there were Mexican baseball teams in the Kansas City area as early as 1923. Fernandez eventually joined the Kansas City *Aztecas* as a star pitcher and first baseman during the 1933-1936 seasons. Some of the players on the 1936 *Aztecas* included Manuel Zuniga, Lupe Molina, Felipe Camacho, Charlie Mendez, Juan Rodriguez, Meno Hernandez, Caderino Montoya, Milo Hernandez, Carlos Montez, Lalo Nieto, Chico Barbosa, Fidencio Paz, and Fred and Paul Saucedo.
- <sup>22</sup> Interview with Frank Lujano of Newton, Kansas, June 18, 1987.
- <sup>23</sup> Interview with Salvador Gutierrez, Kansas City, Missouri, February 25, 1987. Also see *Latin Baseball 50 Years Ago*, author's files. Interview with Lupe Molina, Kansas City, Kansas, June 5, 1987. Gutierrez was a promoter of baseball games in the Kansas City area during the 1930s, and also helped establish Mexican baseball leagues. Molina was born in Mexico in 1902 and has a rich history of playing baseball both in the Southwest and Midwest. In 1924, he organized the *Azteca* baseball team in Kansas City.
- <sup>24</sup> Telephone interview with Ann Antilano, Sterling, Illinois, March 20, 1998.
- <sup>25</sup> Interviews with Federico Hernandez, Parsons, Kansas, July 9, 1988, and Robert Segovia, East Chicago, Indiana, May 19, 1987. Segovia was an outstanding player in East Chicago. Also interview with Salvador Gutierrez, Kansas City, Missouri, February 26, 1987. Gutierrez was born in Mexico in 1911 and came to Kansas City in 1920 working for a packinghouse. He later served in Europe during World War II. He noted that Mexican players were very dominant in the Catholic leagues. These players were known affectionately as the "Guadalupanas." Also see Jan Wahl, *Mexican and Mexican American Fiestas and Celebrations in Scottsbluff, Nebraska*, The Nebraska Committee for the Humanities,

1988, p.15. Wahl found that the earlier Mexican teams formed the Mission League, since most of the teams were sponsored by the Catholic Churches.

26 Interview with Art Morales, East Chicago, Indiana, May 1, 1987. Also interview with Joseph P. Gonzalez, Gary, Indiana, October 16, 1987. Gonzalez played for *Los Gallos* baseball team from 1938 through 1941, before serving in the aviation corps during World War II. The Midwest had several outstanding teams and players besides those in Kansas. These popular teams included *Los Aguilas* of Sterling, Illinois; *Los Tigres* of Rockford, Illinois; the *Aztecas* of Joliet, Illinois; *La Flor de Mayo* of St. Joseph, Missouri; *Los Diablos* and *Los Gallos* of East Chicago, Indiana; the *Aztecs* of Gary, Indiana; *El Club Mexicano*, and *Los Aztecas* from Milwaukee, Wisconsin; the South Chicago Excelsiors; *Los Estrellas de Toledo*; and *Los Mexicanos* of Des Moines, Iowa.

27 Interview with Ramon Pedroza, Newton, Kansas, June 18, 1987. Telephone interview with George Robles, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 24, 1994. Robles has been very involved with Mexican American sports in Wisconsin, and was an outstanding athlete in several sports.

28 Interview with Leo Barajas, Omaha, Nebraska, June 3, 1987.

29 Interview with Ralph Rios, Sterling, Illinois, May 26, 1987.

30 Interview with Victoria (Vicki) Quintana, Parsons, Kansas, July 9, 1988. Interview with Anthony (Tony) Navarro, Davenport, Iowa, June 25, 1986. In the 1980s, several Midwest communities paid tribute to the old-time baseball players. The 1923 Mexican All-Stars team was saluted, for example, by the Quad-Cities Mexican American communities in 1981. The eight surviving members included Cruz Sierra, 78; Socorro Nache, 77; Isaac Rangel, 77; Augie Martel, 77; Joseph Ybarra, 73; Lewis Sierra, 72; and Eleuterio Martel and Jess Castillas, both 70. The community of Horton, Kansas, recognized several players from the 1930s, including Nate Vallejo, Gilbert Martinez, Julio Vallejo, Lolo Vallejo, Nick De La Cruz, Benito De La Cruz, Lupe Espinosa, Phillip Picon, and Fidel Cortez.

31 Interview with Matt Hernandez, Hutchinson, Kansas, January 23, 1987.

32 Interview with Bacho Rodriguez, Hutchinson, January 28, 1987. Also interview with Abraham Vela, Omaha, Nebraska, June 1, 1987. He was born in Horton, Kansas in 1917. His father arrived in 1904 to work on the railroad. Vela played baseball in Nebraska during the 1930s.

33 Interview with Sebastian Alvarez, Fort Madison, Iowa, June 19, 1986. Alvarez was one of the best all-around athletes in Fort Madison during the 1920s and 1930s. He played baseball, basketball, and football in high school. Alvarez played on several Mexican baseball teams and he was later scouted by the Chicago Cubs. Also interview with Antonio (Tony) Rojas, Garden City, Kansas, January 10, 1987. Rojas noted that Margarito "Maggie" Gomez of Newton, Kansas received a letter from the New York Yankees for a try-out as a right-fielder. After World War II, Gomez later received a letter from the St. Louis Cardinals about a try-out.

34 Interview with Art Morales, East Chicago, Indiana, May 1, 1987. Morales noted that nearly 98% of Mexican American players in East Chicago either volunteered or were drafted when the war broke out. Morales played for the service team along with some professional players of the Chicago White Sox. He said it was a great thrill to play with some of the players that he had watched at Comiskey Park. Morales also stated that some of the armed forces baseball teams had Mexican American players.

35 Interview with Juanita Vasquez, East Chicago, Indiana, May 18, 1987.

- <sup>36</sup> Interview with Carol Garcia Martinez, East Chicago, Indiana, May 18, 1987. Garcia's sister was a professional singer and performed at Chicago hotels. Her father had a band in East Chicago during the 1930s. The 1942 *Las Aztecas* of Kansas City, for example, was organized by Mariano Guereca and Nieves Lombrano. Some of the players included Mary and Sarah Fernandez, Vicki Franco, Chona Martinez, Epifinia Carpeo, Nacha Barbosa, Santos Olivia, Lola Oliva, Margarite Rodriguez, Grace Briones, Irene and "Choppy" Ibarra, and Annie Molina.
- <sup>37</sup> Interview with Lola Aguilar, Emporia, Kansas, July 2, 1988. Also interview with Lali Garcia, Kansas City, Kansas, June 5, 1987. She has an excellent history of the women's baseball team in Kansas City.
- <sup>38</sup> Interview with Mary Sousa, Omaha, Nebraska, September 17, 1987. Sousa was born in 1918 and later played baseball with the Our Lady of Guadalupe Church girl's team between 1938-1940.
- <sup>39</sup> *Mexican American Harbor Lights*, East Chicago, Indiana, 1992, p. 80. This book was published by a group of Mexican American women known as Señoras of Yesteryear (SOY). The East Chicago Mexican women' team played against South Chicago, Whiting, Gary, Hessville, and other local teams.
- <sup>40</sup> Interviews with Frederick R. Maravilla, East Chicago, October 16, 1987. Maravilla was the team manager of *Las Gallinas* starting in 1937 and also played on the men's baseball team.
- <sup>41</sup> These teams were primarily concentrated in the states of Kansas and Nebraska.
- <sup>42</sup> Interview with Alberto Muniz, Lincoln Park, Michigan, May 16, 1987.
- <sup>43</sup> Both the G.I. Forum and LULAC chapters had several baseball teams, which entered tournament play in the Midwest. One of the better teams was the Topeka G.I. Forum. In addition, there were other sponsors of Mexican softball teams including the Elks, Lions, Kiwanis and other Lodge sponsorship.
- <sup>44</sup> Interview with Ramon Pedroza, Newton, Kansas, June 18, 1987.
- <sup>45</sup> Interview with Pete M. Guardian, Chanute, Kansas, June 10, 1987.
- <sup>46</sup> Interview with Harley Ponce, Chanute, Kansas, June 10, 1987. Ponce was born in Chanute in 1939.
- <sup>47</sup> Interview with Lalo Perez, Flint, Michigan, May 6, 1987. Perez was born in San Antonio, Texas in 1920 and came to Flint in 1937. Several of his brothers served in the military. To cut costs, teams generally stayed with members of the opposition. The Wichita *Aztecs* often stayed in the homes of opposing team members because it was one way of saving money.
- <sup>48</sup> Interviews with Harley Ponce and Raul Quirarte, Chanute, Kansas, June 10, 1987, and Linda de Leon Cabrera, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, July 10, 1988. Over the years, Midwest softball teams have included the Emporia Brown Eagles, Cudahay Dukes, Flint Pirates, Bethlehem Mexicans, Wichita *Aztecs*, Argentine Eagles, Emporia *Los Chicanos* and *Bandaleros*, Silvis *Aztecas*, Kansas City *Bravos*, Milwaukee *Los Amigos*, Chicago All-Stars, Blue Island *Latinos*, Wichita North End and Builders, and the Waukegan *Aguilas*.
- <sup>49</sup> *Fiesta Program's Tribute to Softball Tournaments, 1948-1988*, author's files.
- <sup>50</sup> Other champions have included the Wichita *Padres* (1972), Hutchinson *Los Lobos* (1976), Oklahoma *Casa Dulce* (1978), Omaha *Mestizos* (1980), Kansas City *Aztecas* (1981), Houston Nine (1982), Pueblo Colorado Angels (1983), and Austin Jokers (1987).
- <sup>51</sup> Interview with Lalo Perez, Flint, Michigan, May 6, 1987.

- <sup>52</sup> Written correspondence with Ricardo Medina, Blythe, California March 2, 1995.
- <sup>53</sup> Interview with Lalo Perez, Flint, Michigan, May 16, 1987.
- <sup>54</sup> Interview with Irene Campos Carr, Aurora, Illinois, author's files.
- <sup>55</sup> Written correspondence with Ricardo Medina, Blyth, California, March 2, 1995.
- <sup>56</sup> Interview with Robert Gomez, Topeka, Kansas, author's files.
- <sup>57</sup> Written correspondence with Ricardo Medina, Blythe, California, March 2, 1995.
- <sup>58</sup> Interview with Paul "Buster" Sanchez, Wichita, Kansas, September 15, 1998.
- <sup>59</sup> Interview with Ray Olais, Newton, Kansas, March 25, 1987.
- <sup>60</sup> Interview with Marge Villanueva Lambert, Lincoln, Nebraska, June 3, 1987, and Dolores Rios, Sterling, Illinois, May 27, 1987.
- <sup>61</sup> Interview with Fifi Jasso, Newton, Kansas, March 25, 1987. Her grandparents and parents came from Mexico to Newton in 1907. Interview with Ila Placencia, Los Angeles, California, December 30, 1994. Placencia shared an incredible amount of history regarding the Mexican community in Des Moines, Iowa. As a young woman, she was active with sports.
- <sup>62</sup> Interview with Juanita Vasquez, East Chicago, Indiana, May 18, 1987.
- <sup>63</sup> Written correspondence with Ricardo Medina, Blythe, California, March 2, 1995.
- <sup>64</sup> Written correspondence with Ricardo Medina, Blythe, California, March 2, 1995.